



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**MIGRATION LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT (FURTHER BORDER
PROTECTION MEASURES) BILL 2002**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Thursday, 20 June 2002

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Katter, Bob, MP

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Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (1.10 pm)—Before rising to speak on the Migration Legislation Amendment (Further Border Protection Measures) Bill 2002, I made urgent telephone calls to my many friends up in the Torres Strait. I felt that the Torres Strait was being treated differently to the rest of Australia. But they had thought the thing out quite logically, in my opinion. Their opinion was that they do not have the resources to be able to cope with people, even some of their cousins, coming in from Bougainville, the Solomons or some of the other problem areas—Irian Jaya, for example. For that reason, they are supporters of what is being proposed. I had drafted that amendment, but I now withdraw that.

The reason that they put up is, of course, a valid reason for Australia. There were at one stage some four million Afghans living outside of Afghanistan. Does this country really have the resources to be able to take four million refugees? There is great upheaval and unrest in Indonesia, according to the media. Do we have the wherewithal to be able to take millions of people coming down from these areas, when at the present we have to reject expensive drugs from the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme because we have not the money to be able to look after our own Australian people?

You have to ask yourself: what are the reasons these people are coming to Australia? In the boat people phenomenon a lot has been made of the fact that there have been no boat people in the last five or six months, but I think everyone in this place would be kidding themselves if they think this is a phenomenon that is going to go away. It is not going to go away, and the reason for that is clear when you look at a country like the Philippines, where the average salary is \$1,400 a year. The average equivalent in Australia, according to the World Bank, is \$14,000. That is one reason these people would come here. The other reason that attracts them here is this: what other country on earth has 6,000 or 7,000 contiguous kilometres of coastline that is unpopulated, undeveloped and undefended? Nowhere else can you simply pull up a boat, land, have someone pick you up, drive off into the gathering darkness and stay there forever. The chances of being apprehended are not very high. This is the only country where people can do that.

This nation has to realise that there is a cultural Brisbane Line. The honourable member for Lilley spoke about it earlier, and it is a subject near and dear to the hearts of those people whose families—like my own as well as his—were north of that line. This nation has to realise it has a responsibility to develop the very extensive resources which God has delivered to it. There is also a responsibility for this country to have a population greater than 20 million people—whether those people come in a disorderly, haphazard fashion and whether they are people that are totally unsuitable, for a whole raft of reasons, to be assimilated into the population of Australia. I do not hesitate to use the word 'assimilated'; I make no apologies to anyone for using it. I come from very much a 'non-pure Merino' background myself, so I have no hesitation in using that term. I come from a family that most certainly has felt the sting of racial prejudice. I have always thought that the solution to this problem lay in going to some of these islands, and I compliment the minister on the excellent job he has done in his portfolio—a most difficult task—and the actions that he has taken.

Some people say that it is cruel to send these people to Christmas Island or to any of the other islands; but there are precedents for that. The Chinese were driven out of the Malay Peninsula to Singapore, and now Singapore is one of the wealthiest nations on earth; it is certainly one of the wealthiest nations in Asia. People were driven to Taiwan not for racial reasons but for political reasons, and now Taiwan is also one of the wealthier nations on earth and is certainly one of the wealthiest nations in Asia. It could be similarly argued that Hong Kong was a creation from the sort of manifestation that is occurring here.

It will cost some money to look after the Christmas Islands of this world, but removing the magnet that is attracting these people here is the real challenge of this nation. The very great historian Geoffrey Blainey, referred to 'a land half won' and the 'tyranny of distance'. Those things are still a great reality for us today. We will continue to suffer as a nation and feel the bitterness of the debate that is taking place here today, until we solve the fundamental problem existing at present, which is the almost total non-occupation of this continent.